LAFAYETTE VISTAS

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A Tale of Two Committees

Open Space Committee

Lafayette has taken great care over the years to protect its semi-rural nature by enacting strict hillside building ordinances that protect views and encourage open space. What many people don't know though is that some of those pristine hillsides, both in and surrounding the city, are privately owned and may not necessarily stay undeveloped forever. While the City does have some ability to control where development occurs on private property, it cannot completely deny the owner the ability to develop.

Now with real estate prices no longer in the stratosphere, the time may be ripe for Lafayette to take steps to ensure that certain beautiful parcels will forever remain untouched. To that end, the Lafayette Open Space Committee has begun work on an open space plan that will be completed by Fall 2009. The plan will address how monies from the East Bay Regional Park District's Measure WW and other funding sources could be allocated to acquire open space in Lafayette.

The committee has already drafted criteria that would determine which parcels are top candidates for acquisition. The criteria favor land that:

- Is close to existing parks, trails, open spaces and existing recreation areas
- Provides vistas of surrounding landscape
- Has habitat restoration or preservation potential, encompasses sensitive species, or provides wildlife corridors
- Preserves ridge tops
- Near creeks and enhances watershed protection for surrounding areas
- Contains oak woodlands
- Aids in joint plans with other public agencies
- Is under the threat of development
- Has steep slopes greater than 20%

When parcels meet some or all of these criteria, an acquisition strategy would be developed. First and foremost, that strategy would need to establish a known and willing seller. Ideally, purchases would leverage other funding sources such as grants, or include joint participation with neighboring communities. Finally, there will need to be a plan – and money – to maintain the property in the long-term.

The Committee is interested in obtaining public input so please send your comments and ideas to Steven Falk, **sfalk@lovelafayette.org.**

Charter City Committee

For most people, the operations and machinations of local government are largely invisible. Certainly, there are services that the city provides that are very noticeable – landscaping, pothole filling and public safety to name a few. However, the important business of local government – the mechanisms by which policies are determined and decisions are made – are not nearly as obvious to the casual observer. In fact, it is probably true that if asked, most Lafayette residents would not know whether the governing system of our City is "general law" or a "charter". More importantly: does it matter? In fact, the issue of how a city governs itself can have a profound effect on its ability to control its own destiny and finances. Therefore, in April, the City Council appointed ten residents to a City Charter Committee to study this very question: "Should Lafayette become a charter city?"

The idea originated with the Lafayette Finance Review Committee. In its December 2008 report, one of the committee's findings was that charter cities have more flexibility to determine how to conduct municipal affairs. Some of the major areas over which charter cities may exercise additional authority include public contracts, payment of prevailing wages, local elections, and the ability to tap additional revenue sources such as increased property transfer tax rates (with voter approval).

Of 478 California cities, 114 have adopted their own charters. They range from large metropolitan cities like Oakland and San Francisco to smaller suburbs like Piedmont and San Ramon. And the numbers is on the rise, as more and more cities seek to maximize their self control and become less reliant on and captive to the state.

The committee expects to present its findings and recommendations to the City Council in September.

City of Lafayette
2008 Environmental Awards of Excellence
Selected by the Lafayette Environmental Task Force

Resident: Fred Curiel

Fred works daily to reduce his family's carbon footprint to the point where his 9-member household is nearly carbon-neutral. He has given up driving, and rides his bike 5-1/2 miles to and from BART five days a week. He has reduced household waste to less than 20 gallons per week. Fred has also installed a gray water system, planted a vegetable garden, replaced all lights to CFLs, cooked with their solar oven, and has a goat that is a big part of their compost and waste system. Fred's neighbors are inspired by his example, and more are riding their bikes – despite the long, tough hill coming home.

Local Business:
Lafayette Health Club

Owner Debbie Swigert has created a good model for environmental stewardship in encouraging limited resource use and sustainable nutrition. The Club has introduced sustainable cleaning supplies, installed low flow plumbing and double-pane windows, posted signs throughout encouraging members to limit water use and turn off lights when not in use, encouraged reuse of water bottles and using metal bottles, became a drop off spot for a local Community Sustainable Agriculture provider, and continued to model healthy living, encouraging good nutrition and outdoor exercise. Instructors and members agree that the Club has made a dramatic change in the past two years to reduce its environmental footprint and develop a culture of sustainability.

Schools:

Kevin Feinstein • Merriewood Children's Center

Kevin is a very green educator who has introduced children ages 3 through 10 to permaculture. He converted the Center's garden to a nearly self-sustaining, permaculture, edible garden. He has thrilled children with the joy of finding their food on nature walks. Kevin's ideas about low-maintenance green gardening have been inspirational to the Merriewood families, nearby neighbors, and visitors to the Center.

Kim Brast • Springhill Elementary School

Kim is Springhill's Science Instructor who has daily contact with 460 students. Kim has been instrumental in the school's recycling, composting, sustainable garden, solar energy programs and daily science and health lessons focusing on a sustainable environment. Under her guidance, Springhill has received the Contra Costa County Wastebusters Award for the past three years. Kim's contributions to the Springhill community over the last ten years have enhanced the greening of the Lafayette community.

Happy Valley Elementary School

In 2008, the school started an eco-friendly hot lunch program, a kid-run recycling team, and planned the first ever "Green Week" to be held at a Lafayette school. The lunch program vendor uses almost 100% compostable products. The recycling team is run by students to monitor lunch recycling and educate other students about recycling lunch waste. The team's efforts have resulted in a 25-30% reduction in lunch waste. Green Week was a great success. There was a special theme each day, such as Reuse Day on Thursday. Donations, including 500 books, three garbage bags of athletic shoes, two tubs of art supplies, 36 pairs of eyeglasses, and 36 cell phones, were collected and distributed to a number of non-profit organizations. Happy Valley Elementary is a great example of what a school can do to be green.

Community Organizations:

Temple Isaiah

Temple Isaiah earned the certification as a Bay Area Green Business in 2008 through significant energy conservation, waste reduction, recycling, and water conservation measures. Some of the accomplishments include: replaced all light bulbs with CFLs, installed programmable thermostats, motion sensors for lighting, and low-flow faucets and toilets, replaced plastic cups with compostable, biodegradable cups, setting printers and copiers to double-sided, monitoring of landscaping water, and distributed reusable shopping bags to every family in the congregation. Temple Isaiah is a model for other congregations for green initiatives.

Lafayette City Office • Special recognition to Janneke Petersen

After the City Council approved green practices for the City Office, the City hired Janneke as a summer intern to implement the practices. Janneke went beyond that task, and became determined to make the Office a certified green business. She switched cleaning products, and instituted an office supply reuse station. She worked with staff to purchase more sustainable office products, and worked with the Office's landlord to reduce water usage and other energy-saving measures. On the last day of Janneke's internship, the Office became a certified Contra Costa Green Business thanks to her efforts.

2009-2010 Municipal Budget

While the circumstances of each and every fiscal year are unique, FY2009/10 is shaping up to be – how shall we say this? – more unique than others. The collapse of the real estate and housing markets has mired the nation in a recession. The banking sector is in tatters. The auto industry is in free fall. Unemployment is worse than it has been in decades and is now approaching double figures. The State of California is facing a $24 billion deficit with no credible plan to plug the hole. Term limits have stripped the State of experienced leaders with a long term stake in a financially sound California, and forty years of short sighted legislation, smoke, mirrors, and get-out-of-town budgets have left the State functionally bankrupt and grasping for straws. While it is disappointing that the State is once again eyeing city revenues, it is not surprising.

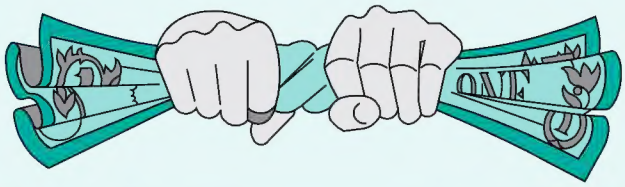
Indeed, at press time, the State was not only considering taking a $2B loan from California's cities, but also stripping them of most of the gas tax money that is used to pave roads. For Lafayette the combined losses could total $1M.

Likewise, Contra Costa County is flailing. The Board of Supervisors has historically approved too-generous pension and retirement health care benefit plans and then underfunded them. This approach worked when the County was rapidly expanding, but in recessionary times the combination is deadly. The County Administrator now estimates that, to meet its contract obligations, the County will need an additional $100 million annually – this, during a period of declining revenues. These deferred entitlement liabilities could force the County, over the next few years, to lay off a quarter of its workforce or else consider declaring bankruptcy to void the employment contracts.

Meantime, in its scramble to raise additional revenues, Contra Costa County continues to increase rates and otherwise slough off, where possible, its responsibilities to the cities. In 2006, the County charged Lafayette $54,000 for Animal Control; now it wants $125,000 for the same level of service. Library services, senior transportation services, and other social services are all being deliberately devolved to cities throughout Contra Costa.

Most recently the District Attorney send a note to all Contra Costa police chiefs announcing that, due to layoffs, he does not have staff capability to prosecute misdemeanors, and would thus no longer be taking action on shoplifting, trespassing, vandalism, and certain assault and battery crimes. The DA later backpedaled, suggesting as an alternative that he may be willing to deputize city attorneys, thus giving cities the privilege to pay for the prosecution of crimes that the County can no longer afford to handle.

If other government agencies would just leave us alone, Lafayette might be OK.



Of all County cost increases, the most threatening to Lafayette is the rising cost of the Sheriff's contract. Lafayette's total cost for police services in 2005 was $2.9M, but we expect that number to climb to $4.0M in the next fiscal year and – unless something is done – to $7M within five years. It was prescient for the City Council, earlier this year, to engage the Matrix Consulting Group to study less costly alternatives to the Sheriff's contract. And towards that end, in this year's budget, the Council set aside $250,000 to fund potential costs that may be needed to transition to a new police service provider.

This is the long way round to saying that if the other government agencies would just leave us alone, Lafayette might be OK. In fact, if not for the big grab from the State and the hefty long term cost increases in Sheriff's services, Lafayette would nicely thrive.

On the expenditure side, the City has long budgeted conservatively; this year's budget doesn't deviate from that approach. We continue to contract for most services, seeking the lowest qualified bidders where possible. In fact, we were able to negotiate with our current public works contractors to reduce our overall rates by $85,000. In addition, our employees work on a pay-for-performance basis – there are no automatic salary increases, and Lafayette does not participate in the pension retirement programs that are causing so much trouble in so many other jurisdictions. Recognizing that these are lean times with flat revenues, the City's department heads were tasked this year with delivering lean budgets while not cutting service levels, and they have done so; we expect that total general fund expenditures, transfers and restrictions ($11.4M) will decrease by 1% compared to estimated actual FY2008/09 expenditures.

The net result is a budget that, while lean, is still out of balance by about $400,000. Recognizing this, the Council approved a financial plan that would pay the difference by spending down about 5% of the City's $8.3M reserve.

While nobody likes deficit spending, this is what the reserve was designed for: to provide smooth and consistent service levels during both expansionary and recessionary periods. The Council has saved judiciously for many years and, even with the draw-down, the City's reserve will still be well above the 50% target level at year's end.

Alas, the budget – and particularly the revenue estimates – are pessimistic, and we are hopeful that the economy will quickly lift itself from this downward cycle. However, if this downturn is longer than expected, the City Council will likely need to re-open the budget and consider serious budget balancing options including reducing police costs, reducing other service levels, delivering new revenues, or some combination of those hard choices.

Around Town

PARKS & RECREATION

Come on down to the Lafayette Community Center for some family fun!

Aug 5 & 12 — **SKATE & SCOOT ON THE RINK** • 10:30 – 11:30 am

Aug 14 — **CAPT'N JACK SPARERIBS, THE ENTERTAINING PIRATE** • 11:00 am

Aug 14 — **FREE DODGEBALL & MOVIE NIGHT ON THE RINK** • 7:30–10:00 pm

Sept 19-20 — **14TH ANNUAL ART & WINE FESTIVAL** • Arts and crafts booths, food, wine, micro-brewed beer, and live music. Downtown Lafayette. Call the Chamber of Commerce at 284-7404 for more information.

Sept 3 – Oct 3 — **TOWN HALL THEATER** • ART – a play by Yasmina Reza, translated by Christopher Hampton. 'Art' begins as a difference of opinion which quickly ignites a crisis of clashing values as old resentments and frustrations surface. Described as a marriage between Moliere and Woody Allen, this play asks the big questions: what is art, and why does it matter? Tickets and info: 925-283-1557 or **www.thtc.org**

Save the Date

Announcing **"Celebrate A Place,"** the theme for the Grand Opening celebrations planned for our long-anticipated **Lafayette Library and Learning Center.**

LAFAYETTE LIBRARY AND LEARNING CENTER

- **Saturday, November 7 • 6:30 – 11:00pm**

  "Celebrate A Novel Evening" Library Gala – all of Lafayette, our neighbors and supporters are invited. Exquisite food, tours throughout the building, middle school, high school & community chorale/instrumental groups, Mixx Company dance band, and much more.

- **Saturday, November 14 • 9:30am – 5:00pm**

  Grand Opening – Ribbon-cutting, library tours, Glenn Seaborg Learning Consortium performances & exhibits, mimes, food, Friends of the Lafayette Library Book Room Opening, new Lafayette Historical Society digs with the Old Betsy fire engine. Lots to see and do.

City Directory

For Council Members call: **284-1968**

Council Members

Don Tatzin	**Mayor**
Brandt Andersson	**Vice Mayor**
Mike Anderson	**Council Member**
Carl Anduri	**Council Member**
Carol Federighi	**Council Member**

Messages to **all** Council Members:
cityhall@lovelafayette.org

Administration

General Reception and	**284-1968**
Steven Falk, City Manager	**Fax: 284-3169**
Tracy Robinson, Admin. Srv. Dir.	**299-3227**
Gonzalo Silva, Financial Srv. Mgr.	**299-3213**
Joanne Robbins, City Clerk	**299-3210**

Community Development

Ann Merideth, Director	**299-3218**
Tony Coe, Engineering Srv. Mgr.	**284-1951**
Niroop Srivatsa, Planning Srv. Mgr.	**284-1976**
Ron Lefler, Public Works Srv. Mgr.	**299-3214**
P.W. Hotline (to report problems)	**299-3259**

If you observe illegal dumping in creeks & storm drains or accidental spills on roads, call Contra Costa Hazardous Materials Division 646-2286.

Lamorinda School Bus Program

Juliet Hansen, Program Mgr.	**299-3216**
	Or 299-3215

Parks, Trails and Recreation **284-2232**

Jennifer Russell, Director

Senior Services	**284-5050**

Police Services

Emergency: 24 Hours	**911**
Police Dispatch: 24 Hours	**284-5010**
Police Business Office:	**283-3680**

Anonymous Tipline, Traffic Enforcement, Suggestions & LEARN (Laf. Emergency Action Response Network), 299-3232 X 2205

Fax	**284-3169**
Address	**3675 Mt. Diablo Blvd. #210, Lafayette, CA 94549**
Website	**www.ci.lafayette.ca.us**

E-MAIL: Council/staff members can be reached via e-mail using this address format:
First Initial + Last Name @lovelafayette.org
Example: SFalk@lovelafayette.org

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